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ABSTRACT

This document presents the final report of a dropout prevention counseling program designed for elementary school students in McDowell County, West Virginia. The purpose of the program is explained and three objectives met by the project are identified: (1) counseling sessions were held with each of the identified potential dropouts (N=206) in two county school districts with high dropout rates; (2) individual and group counseling were provided for parents of potential dropouts; and (3) at least one general parents' meeting was held in each of the schools in the districts. Seven specific outcomes of the project are listed, showing that the project helped school personnel to identify dropouts, helped to coordinate program components, visited homes of potential dropouts, conducted parent meetings, completed follow-up work, developed a tracking system for following students, and increased parental awareness of the detrimental effects of dropping out of school. The work schedule of the project is reviewed and a summary of the program is provided. The report concludes with a section on evaluation and recommendations which acknowledges the success of the program in its efforts to reduce the number of dropouts through parental support. (NB)

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DROPOUT PREVENTION COUNSELING PROGRAM

FINAL REPORT

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DROPOUT PREVENTION ELEMENTARY COUNSELING PROGRAM

FINAL REPORT

I. PARTIES

A grant agreement was implemented between the McDowell County Board of Education, Welch, West Virginia, and the Appalachian Regional Commission. Other parties involved were: 1) Jim W. Jones, the Grantee's Project Director; 2) J. Kenneth Roberts, Coordinator of Guidance and Counseling; and, 3) Marilyn G. Bush, Guidance Counselor.

II. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this program was to implement a program at the elementary level which would lead to a reduction in dropouts.

Objectives

The objectives met by this project include:

1. counseling sessions with each of the approximately 206 identified potential dropouts in the two county school districts with the highest dropout rates;

2. provided individual and group counseling sessions with the parents of these identified potential dropouts; and

3. held at least one general parents' meeting in each of the schools in these districts for the purpose of informing and improving awareness on the part of parents of school children there.

Outcomes

The specific outcomes were as follows:

1. helped school personnel to identify dropouts;

2. helped coordinate the various components of the Dropout Prevention Program;

3. visited homes of potential dropouts;

4. conducted parent meetings within the schools;

5. completed follow-up work in relation to existing dropout program components;

6. developed a tracking system for following elementary students through the school system until graduation; and

7. increased awareness of parents of the detrimental effects of dropping out of school.

III. WORK SCHEDULE

There were a few changes in the work schedule for this year. As recommended in the previous report, Bradshaw Junior High and Iaeger Intermediate School were deleted from the schedule. Those schools have full time guidance counselors, and all students were referred to them.

A total of nine schools is now included in the adjusted schedule. The schedule is as follows:

Week One	Caretta (home base)	Monday
(War Area)	Berwind	Tuesday
	War Annex	Wednesday
	Bartley	Thursday
	Newhall-Coalwood	Friday
Week Two	Caretta (home base)	Monday
(Iaeger Area)	Panther	Tuesday
	Panther/Iaeger	Wednesday
	Jolo	Thursday
	Iaeger Elem	Friday

IV. SUMMARY OF PROGRAM

Once again, students for dropout prevention counseling were initially selected by their teachers. The teachers based their selection on an established criteria list (see Appendix A). This year, a Dropout Prevention Referral Form was also used for student selection (see Appendix B).

A conference was held with each fifth and sixth grade teacher on the days I visited their schools. The conferences were needed to gain teacher insight on those students selected and to try to form a cooperative and advisory relationship with the teachers.

Enrollment

The Big Creek Area schools has 131 students and the Iaeger Area enrollment is 75, for a total of 206 students for the program this year. A decline of 50 students is noted this year, as the previous year's total enrollment was 256.

The decline in the number of students can be attributed to the deletion of Bradshaw Junior High and Iaeger Intermediate Schools. However, all identified potential dropouts in those schools were referred to the counselors of those schools.

Another factor to be considered for the reduced enrollment is the low economic conditions that are prevalent in McDowell County. Around 1,000 students have been deleted from county school rosters in the past year.

The number of students per school is as follows:

Bartley Elementary.....20
Berwind Elementary.....19
Caretta Elementary.....32
Coalwood Elementary.....: 8
Iaeger Elementary.....23
Jolo Elementary.....25
Newhall Elementary.....11
Panther Elementary.....27
War Annex.....41

The above figures also included students in the Lifeskills Program, which is a component of the existing County Dropout Prevention Program. Those students are identified as potential dropouts, and are automatically referred for counseling.

Parent Meetings and Homevisits

A general parent meeting has been held at each school. Students were given notices in advance to take to parents, and were encouraged to ask parents to attend. Attendance at most meetings improved, but continued to be quite low.

Many parents are prone to stop by the school unannounced, rather than attend the parent meetings. Individual parent conferences seemed to be preferred over group meetings.

Home visits were made this year with the Lifeskills Aides or the Community Worker for Federal Programs. Almost every child's home was visited, except for those whose parents would not be home on the day of the visits. A conscious effort was then made to visit those homes on another date.

Parents were informed of the purpose of the program and the role of the guidance counselor. Pamphlets entitled "Elementary School Counselor" were handed out to each parent.

V. EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Dropout Prevention Elementary Counseling Program has been successful and rewarding. The greatest emphasis has been placed on reducing the number of dropouts through parental support.

The full success of this program may not be fully known for years to come, when the fifth and sixth grades that are now being counseled reach the age of sixteen and decide whether or not to remain in school.

All elementary schools in McDowell County will offer counseling services next year. New legislative requirements and the success of this program has prompted the hiring of the counselors. The tracking system for this program will be updated by the new elementary counselors.

The success of this program can be determined by several factors. Of the 206 students enrolled in the program, around 25% now participate in extracurricular sports or other activities, around 60% have improved their grades, and 10% have decreased absenteeism.

Future indications are that the dropout rate will be lower because of better achievements of the students.

Several parents have visited the schools and asked for counseling for their children, even though they have not been identified as potential dropouts. This indicates the necessity to continue the program through additional elementary counselors in the future.

Studies are needed to determine ways of getting parents more involved with reducing the dropout rate. The general parent meetings and homevisits have been beneficial, but increased parental support is imperative to any dropout prevention program.